

# **May 12 , 2005 - Indiana Department of Correction Commissioner Shares Positive Outlook at First Faith and Character-Based Advisory Board Meeting**

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**By Java Ahmed and Tim Brown**



**Faith and Character-Based Board Meeting**

Indianapolis, IN - the Indiana Department of Correction recently held its first Faith and Character-Based Advisory Board meeting. This board is comprised of legislators, community leaders, educators and faith leaders throughout the State of Indiana. J. David Donahue kicked-off the meeting by discussing the newest of the Department's initiatives - Indiana PLUS.

Purposeful Living Units Serve (PLUS) is a faith and character-based initiative geared towards equipping its participant to explore and choose alternatives to criminal thinking and behavior through an emphasis on spiritual, moral and character development and life-skills training. The program will help prepare offenders for life as they re-enter the community.

The PLUS program is a voluntary opportunity which has two learning disciplines a faith track and a character track. The programming is designed for offenders who are of a particular faith, unsure of their

particular faith, or have no faith at all. It is the intent of the program to instill traits for successful reentry back to the community. These traits can be learned based upon an offender interjecting his or her own religious beliefs or by the offender learning from character building activities in a secular context.

The Indiana PLUS Program's initial phases will begin as pilot units at three different facilities: Indianapolis Women's Prison, Correctional Industrial Facility and Plainfield Juvenile Correctional Facility. The program will begin on June 1, with 174 participants and by September 1, the program anticipates enrollment to reach 338 participants. The advisory board will serve as a vital component to the design of this program. Although there is growing number of faith and character-based initiatives in correctional facilities across the country because the lack of empirical data from these existing institutions it is important for the Indiana PLUS pilots to have state-wide input from the community leaders, practitioners and volunteers.

In addition the Board's opportunity to hear the Department's agenda in regards to this re-entry initiative, the purpose of the Advisory Board is to serve as an accountability tool for the Department. During this first meeting, board members were briefed on the legislation which requires the Department to provide an update on the progress of these faith and character-based pilot units. Furthermore, there was synopsis of what states are doing nationally in regards to faith and character based programming. The meeting also provided an opportunity to introduce how the Department intends to administer the program and what are the tangible benchmarks that will be evaluated to determine the program's success.

J. David Donahue ended the meeting by adding, "I want to be a guiding light in corrections. I expect this board to support me in getting this model to succeed. We will set an example for other agencies across the states. That is our goal. With that said, let's make the Faith and Character-based launch a home run in Indiana."

### ***IDOC Faith/Character-Based Advisory Board 2005***

Representative Eric Turner

Representative Bill Crawford

Senator Gary Dillon

Mrs. Paula Parker-Sawyer,  
Commissioner  
Office of Faith-Based Initiatives

Mr. Olgen Williams,  
Director  
Christamore House

Mr. Issac Randolph  
City Council member

Mr. Larry Noles West  
Designer and Construction

Rev. Angelique Walker-Smith Executive Director  
Church Federation of Indianapolis

Mr. Rob Sambosky  
Director  
Companions on the Journey

Chaplain Ken Johnson  
Associate Pastor  
National Motivational Speaker

Mrs. Shelia Hudson  
Executive Director  
Allen County Community Corrections

Mr. Umar Al-Khattab  
Imam/ Director  
Masjid Al-Fijr

Rev. Samuel Ruiz  
Vice-President  
Hispanic Clergy Group

Mr. Jim Collins  
Director  
Catholic Charities

Dr. Steve Smith  
Professor of Justice Studies  
Taylor University

Mr. Ed Simcox,  
former Secretary of State, involved with Prison Fellowship Nationally and Locally